



BRIEFING: MARCH 2010 OPERATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA ITEM #4

TO: Committee Chair Katz and Authority Board Members

FROM: Jeffrey M. Barker, Deputy Director

DATE: 2/22/10

RE: Statewide Communications and Outreach Update

Introduction

The California High-Speed Rail Authority ("Authority") has entered an important new phase in its existence. State bond financing and the promise of federal stimulus funding will help bring the high-speed train project closer to reality. However, that means the fragmented outreach and communications processes that were put into place to support regional CEQA and NEPA requirements must now be expanded to a coordinated statewide communications program. This is necessary to ensure accuracy and consistency of information about this important public project, as well as improve access to that information.

The following is a rundown of the Board's policy direction in regards of outreach and communication, and the findings and preliminary recommendations resulting from a 30-day audit conducted by newly contracted consultant Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide ("Ogilvy").

I. Directive

The California High-Speed Rail Authority Board stipulated at the February 2010 monthly meeting that all regional communications activities will be coordinated through the Authority's Deputy Executive Director for Communications and Outreach ("Deputy Director").

This alignment of communications activities will encompass all public and local government outreach and engagement activity conducted by the program management team and its regional program managers, as well as by the nine section project management teams.

This alignment will be managed in concert with the statewide public communications program that will be administered by Ogilvy under the Deputy Director's supervision.

II. Communications Audit

Ogilvy is conducting a statewide communications audit to inform development of appropriate strategies and protocols. The audit includes:

- Review of all communications materials from the Authority and regional teams.
- Review and analysis of news media coverage over the past three months.
- Written survey of regional outreach teams about tools and processes they currently use and to solicit their input for future direction.
- Meetings with each of the regional outreach teams to discuss the surveys and probe deeper about communications strategies, challenges and opportunities in each section.
- Review of tapes and transcripts from public meetings and hearings.
- Key informant interviews.

This report summarizes the findings and recommendations to date.

A. Key findings and Topline Recommendations

- Regional outreach efforts focus primarily on audiences involved in the EIR/EIS process. Each section has a robust and dedicated outreach team committed to assisting the lead engineering firms. However, each section's outreach team and internal communication channels operate differently region to region. This results in differing directives to regional outreach teams from the engineering firms and Authority staff, and to an inconsistent and occasionally conflicting public message from the Authority.
- Varied spokespeople offer inconsistent and sometimes conflicting information. Identifying, coordinating and supporting "approved" project spokespersons will help maintain accuracy and help minimize the confusion about who represents the and who does not.

- Regionalized materials and collateral do not contain consistent information across the state. Streamlining, cross checking and making sure consistency in all documents related to this project will ensure accuracy of information and streamline redundancy.
- The Authority Web site can be a much more useful resource. The Authority's plans to enhance and improve the Web site are timely and necessary. Most of the people we talked to asked for specific places on the Web site about each corridor planning section.
- The 2009 Business Plan has provided unending fodder for skeptics and critics. Public questions about the assumptions and forecasts in the Plan must be addressed in a strategic and thoughtful manner.
- The absence of a published description about how decisions will be made about selecting alternatives for future study and other key issues leaves a void filled with confusion, speculation and misinformation. Policies or structure must be developed or – in the event that they already exist – communicated effectively to staff, consultants and interested parties.
- Lack of staff capacity at the Authority has resulted in delayed response to requests, inconsistent response for approvals from regional teams, and high potential for missed opportunities. This presents an opportunity for Ogilvy to create a system for triaging and responding to the hundreds of daily requests that come into the Deputy Director and the Authority, which will also help provide consistent and accurate information, as well as a rapid response process to set the record straight when needed.

B. Overall Opportunities Identified by the Audit

- Broaden the outreach efforts. Since Proposition 1A passed, the focus on community outreach has moved to the regions where the alignments are being studied. However, this is a new statewide transportation system that all Californians have a vested interest in. The Authority must engage a broader audience of residents, elected officials and community leaders as it moves forward.
- Reinforce transparency in project management and decision making. As the Authority transitions from an agency planning for a high-speed train to one that will build it, it must fill the void of information related to how the process will unfold and key decisions will be made.
- Increase public understanding about what this means. The recent award of federal stimulus dollars has helped to propel the project into the media's – and therefore the public's – consciousness about the high-speed train. However, a specific information void exists. Interest among national, international and continued local

media outlets provides a valuable opportunity to provide factual information about California's high-speed train.

- Harness the dedication of the team. The regional outreach team consultants are dedicated to do what it takes to ensure a thorough and high-quality environmental review process. Given the right tools and information, they can be a tremendous on-the-ground asset to reinforce the Authority's commitment to a transparent and collaborative process.

C. Detailed Findings

1. Regional Outreach Teams

- Some regional consultants report that they receive conflicting direction. Regional teams also report that they receive input directly from Board Members, which occasionally differs from directives from Authority staff and their engineering team leads.
- Regional outreach teams are in place to support local EIR/EIS efforts.
 - An environmental review process tends to highlight opposition, concerns about impacts and preferred alternatives.
- Regional outreach teams report to local engineering teams, with a varying degree of coordination with the Authority or with other teams in regions throughout the state.
- Regional projects are each in a different phase of the scoping process which tends to complicate project messaging.
- The reporting protocols within the regional teams are not structured, and have inconsistent methods for getting relevant information back to the Authority.
- There is no one repository among regional teams for tracking and responding to media calls, speaker requests, elected official questions or community feedback.

2. Public Information Materials

- Each team creates their own public outreach materials, typically using content found on the Authority's Web site.
- Little information in languages other than English.
- No consistency in look and feel of materials.
- Materials are copy-heavy and not well designed for general public consumption.

3. Staffing

- Authority staff is overwhelmed by barrage of requests and deadlines, with limited time for long-term communication strategy development or proactive outreach.
- Each region has different model for Authority staff oversight. This evidently complicates the flow of communication and compromises standardized decision-making and how the Authority is represented in each region.
- Coordinated statewide communication efforts have dissipated since the passage of the Proposition 1A. No statewide strategic campaign has been developed since its passage.

4. Media Relations and Public Affairs

- It appears that the Authority generally reacts to media and other matters rather than operating in a proactive and strategic manner. It appears that there has been insufficient advance time to plan and prepare for key milestones and significant events.
- Board members tend to speak to the media and other elected officials about the project independent of coordination by Authority and independent of each other.
- Lack of consistent messaging leaves a void that can easily be filled by people without accurate information.
- Lack of information and descriptions about key policies and decisions leave staff and consultants unable to counter criticisms and correct misinformation.
- Regional engineers/planners tend to speak to the project in technical terms and “in the weeds development scenarios” that are largely geared to address issues risen by opponents of the project. As a result, interested parties may have a general misunderstand what is happening and how specific information may or may not relate to the project as a whole.

D. Recommendations

This communications assessment will continue through February. However, we recommend that protocols be immediately developed and implemented for the following, while the audit concludes:

1. Rapid response

- Daily calls with top communications/outreach team members to debrief on the events of the day.
 - Plan protocols for alerts, response.

- Alert Ogilvy team statewide so if any given issue is picked up statewide a proactive plan is already in place
 - Alert Strategic Advisory Group to keep information portals open at all times.
 - Conduct necessary tracking and regional response.
2. Information and message matrix
 - Develop approved language for many uses. An overall statewide message matrix will be clearly utilized within all messaging and a set protocol for reviewing and bringing consistency to all regional and statewide collateral.
 3. Media monitoring
 - Conduct real time monitoring of the print, social media, radio and TV coverage and developing matrix outlines for understanding how the project is being covered.
 4. Project spokespersons
 - Develop protocols regarding who represents the Authority, when they will represent the Authority, what information they will use and how they will provide follow up to Authority staff.
 - Provide media skills and presentation skills workshops as needed.
 - Provide immediate contact reports – who, when and what action is required.
 5. Public events: EIR/EIS process by regional outreach teams
 - Overall statewide calendar; regional calendars
 - Meeting framework
 - Briefings before and after events
 - Reports and planned follow-up
 6. Public events: Special events, local activities by statewide Ogilvy team
 - Develop master calendar
 - Community events
 - Commemorative events
 - Events hosted by local elected officials, local jurisdictions
 - Planning, preparation, staffing, event reports, follow-up
 7. Information materials
 - Collateral materials audit is underway
 - Message consistency audit is underway
 - Protocols will be developed to:

- Standardize commonly used items
- Establish templates and consistent formatting
- Develop time stamp materials for knowing when a document should be taken out of circulation
- Establish clear and efficient review and approval process
- Establish stakeholder database management and use

8. Web site audit and redesign

- Develop a more user-friendly resource for information dissemination
- Create protocol for daily postings/ additions to the site

9. Public Inquiries

- Take a two-week break on non-essential events, speaker requests, etc. until the message matrix is developed and implemented
- Respond to past and present requests sent to the Authority, and begin providing responses/ holding conversations; Standardize who will handle daily responses and how they will be tracked

10. Internal Team Coordination

- Ensure that Authority staff has communicated the new protocols to regional teams. Coordinate and manage all communications through Deputy Director/Ogilvy team.
- Authority staff will follow-up with Board members. Identify what is important to each of them, secure their commitments to keep Deputy Director informed of media and other contacts so consistency and accuracy can be maintained from a top down approach.

Staff Recommendation

For discussion and further Committee input